

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

Fourteenth District, Michigan
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus

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CONTACT:
Keenan Keller
202-225-6906

Conyers Invites Reparations Convention to Lobby Congress for "A Year of Black Presence (AYBP)"

Representative John Conyers, Jr., (D-MI) ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, addressed the opening plenary session of the National Reparations Convention and called on attendees to lobby their legislators for the passage of reparations legislation. Congratulating participants for combining their voices at the convention to place the issue of reparations high on the national agenda, Conyers observed that, "It is not enough to talk among ourselves. We need to get on the road and into the halls of government. So, I invite all of you to visit Washington to lobby members of Congress to support the passage of my federal reparations study legislation, H.R. 40 as part of the "A Year of Black Presence (AYBP)" lobbying initiative."

Conyers has introduced legislation (H.R. 40) that would establish a national commission to examine the institution of slavery. That commission would study the impact of slavery and continuing discrimination against African-Americans, resulting directly and indirectly from slavery, during the apartheid of reconstruction, desegregation and the present day. The commission would make recommendations concerning any form of apology and compensation.

Conyers stated that, "Legislative efforts must be part of our strategy to gain reparations. Across the nation, three state legislatures, Louisiana, California and Florida, have passed resolutions supporting H.R. 40. Another three states, New Jersey, New York and Texas, have legislation pending. In addition, twelve major cities have passed similar legislation. These state and local resolutions are crucial to sending the message to your members in the United States Senate and House of Representatives that the time has come to give serious consideration to the issue of reparations at the federal level."

Conyers observed that, "The legacy of slavery lingers heavily in this nation. While we have focused on the social effects of slavery and segregation, its continuing economic implications have been largely ignored by mainstream analysis. These economic issues are the root cause of many critical issues in the African-American community today, such as education, healthcare and crime. The call for reparations represents a commitment to entering a constructive dialogue on the role of slavery and racism in shaping present-day conditions in our community and American society."

Conyers stated that, "Reparations and the establishment of this commission are not about giving a check to individuals. Statements dismissing reparations on the grounds of payment questions are completely premature, especially when we have not yet had a national dialogue or study of the issue. Given that trust funds that have been established for Holocaust survivors, internment victims and Native Americans, there is ample precedent for slavery reparations. Clearly this issue merits discussion at all levels, local, national and international, to develop a consensus on the most appropriate way to confront the vestiges of past and continuing discrimination."

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